

I Claim:

1. A method for providing a loaner car to a customer who scheduled a service appointment for a vehicle at a service center using a machine connected to a distributed computer network, comprising the steps of:
 - a) providing through the machine an electronic appointment book maintained by the service center for the customer to see;
 - b) the customer scheduling a service appointment in the electronic appointment book;
 - c) prompting the customer for a loaner car; and
 - d) if the customer requests the loaner car,
 1. pre-approving the loaner car request;
 2. establishing a code for releasing car keys to the loaner car;
 3. providing to the customer the code to a lock box at the service center; and
 4. releasing the car keys to the customer upon entry of the code at the lock box.
2. The method as in claim 1, wherein if prescribed conditions are met by the customer, then the loaner car is provided to the customer free of cost.
3. The method as in claim 2, wherein the prescribed conditions include spending at least threshold dollar amount at the service center.

- 1 4. The method as in claim 2, wherein the prescribed conditions include that the
2 customer have purchased the vehicle at a dealership associated with the service
3 center.
- 1 5. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of the customer retrieving
2 keys to the customer's vehicle from the lock box using the code.
- 1 6. The method as in claim 5, wherein the customer's keys are only retrievable if a
2 bill for the service appointment has been paid.
- 1 7. The method as in claim 1, wherein the code is provided to the customer by e-mail.
- 1 8. The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of pre-approving the loaner car request
2 includes obtaining one or more of the following: a security deposit from the
3 customer, the customer's driver's license, and information concerning the
4 customer's vehicle insurance.
- 1 9. A method for providing a loaner car to a customer who scheduled a service
2 appointment for a vehicle at a service center using a machine connected to a
3 distributed computer network, comprising the steps of:

- a) providing through the machine an electronic appointment book maintained by the service center for the customer to see;
- b) the customer scheduling a service appointment in the electronic appointment book;
- c) prompting the customer for a loaner car; and
- d) if the customer requests the loaner car,
 1. pre-approving the loaner car request;
 2. receiving a code from a lock box at the service center;
 3. providing to the customer the code to a lock box at the service center; and
 4. releasing the car keys to the customer upon entry of the code at the lock box.

10. The method as in claim 9, wherein if prescribed conditions are met by the customer, then the loaner car is provided to the customer free of cost.

11. The method as in claim 10, wherein the prescribed conditions include spending at least threshold dollar amount at the service center.

12. The method as in claim 10, wherein the prescribed conditions include that the customer have purchased the vehicle at a dealership associated with the service center.

1 13. The method as in claim 9, including the additional step of the customer retrieving
2 keys to the customer's vehicle from the lock box using the code.

1 14. The method as in claim 13, wherein the customer's keys are only retrievable if a
2 bill for the service appointment has been paid.

1 15. The method as in claim 9, wherein the code is provided to the customer by e-mail.

1 16. The method as in claim 9, wherein the step of pre-approving the loaner car request
2 includes obtaining one or more of the following: a security deposit from the
3 customer, the customer's driver's license, and information concerning the
4 customer's vehicle insurance.